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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the family vacation as a common leisure experience, with emphasis on the rise of the theme park. Theme parks, designed to enable parents to entertain everyone in the family with minimal frustration in organization and application, provide a single-price, inside-the-gate, complete experience. In 1955, Disneyland opened in southern California; due to technological advances, today it represents the past. Disney World (in Florida), which represents the present, recognizing that children are well served in all theme parks, pioneered in dults as well. Jurassic Park represents the fictitious future, the major change being in entertainment (live dinosaurs). Biological and electronic technologies have combined to produce live dinosaur clones. What is absent, however, is hands-on excitement. The leisure challenge presents the following problems: (1) people have very little time to play; people forget how to play; and they even forget what play is; and (2) play has become too structured; it is completely rule-bound and calls for little imagination. Visitors to theme parks tend to conform to the technology with unquestioned acceptance. The leisure-oriented solution would be to: learn to use technology, rather than just react to it; be innovative and creative in approaching leisure options; and use technology as an asset. (LL)

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MICKEY MOUSE GOES TO JURASSIC PARK: THE CHALLENGE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR LEISURE

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When *Time* magazine examined what it called "The Leisure Empire" (Bernstein, 1990), it focused on media leisure: books, records, and movies. It rightly commented that "American entertainment has gone global and is changing both those who consume it and those who create it" (p. 56). However, it completely missed the growing worldwide phenomenon of the theme park vacation, previously a wholly American custom. Neil Postman, in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), also views leisure and amusement from that limited perspective. I want to examine the challenge of technology for the leisure field. In doing so, I will use the vacation as an analogy for leisure as a practice, a profession, and an industry.

THE FAMILY VACATION AS A COMMON LEISURE EXPERIENCE

We forget that organized travel is a *very* old tradition. In the past, travel was seen as an adventure, an experience out of the ordinary. Many classical writings are travel tales and adventures, such as the *Odyssey* and the Nordic and Icelandic sagas. The same is true of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, both of them among the first vernacular works in their respective languages. In more recent times, the organized travel industry grew from the mid-19th century, led by people like Thomas Cook.

In the past, distant travel and vacation were rare. They were an adventure for the well-to-do person, like Phileas Fogg in *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Today we think of travel and vacation as common, an experience of the masses. Though it is still an exaggeration, we think of the far-away vacation as common to all. Certainly, it is no longer considered rare, or even uncommon. We are not even aware of how ordinary we consider extensive travel. I do not think of myself as a traveler, but when I made a list of American airports that I have flown through, I listed 50 airports in 25 states.

SYNERGY ON VACATION

The past few decades have seen radical changes in vacation practices. I am particularly interested in the rise of the theme parks. They are the successor of the older amusement parks that have disappeared from most areas. Those parks were close to home in the largest cities, allowing a convenient day or evening of fun.

While family vacations are hardly new, in 1955 we saw a quantum leap in the concept with the opening of Disneyland in southern California. That Disneyland was the ultimate form of Mies van der Rohe's statement that "less is more" (Peter, 1977, p. 29). It covered a tiny area (about 22 acres), yet it could handle vast crowds. As a result of the Disneyland experience, for the next two decades we saw the slow death of the old local parks, replaced by

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regional theme parks. The new parks were designed to appeal to people within a day's drive by car, providing a vacation experience for one or more days.

The first difference between the new parks and the old parks was that the theme park provided a single-price, inside-the-gate complete experience. You did not *have* to pay more, unless you wanted the amenities (such as food and drink, souvenirs, and other sometimes rather costly options).

These new parks were huge. They were created in rural settings, because they need room (and political freedom) to create a complete "environment." The ultimate example is Disney World, the East Coast second-generation incarnation of Walt Disney's American dream. The scale is one that describes an attendance of 20,000 people at one time as "semi-private," 55,000 as "busy," over 75,000 as "crowded," and recommends reservations as much as two years ahead of time for the most popular times of year (Birnbaum, 1987). It interests news magazines, such as one cover description titled "The Mouse That Ate Orlando" (Allen 1989), as well as regular newspaper travel features (Kloer, 1989).

A typical advertising campaign includes a recent 10-page, full-color, heavy-paper center insert in a national news magazine. It includes advertisements for company-owned hotels, entertainment focus centers targeted at different specified age groups, an airline, a cruise ship line, a car rental firm, and a national reservation center that says "Walt Disney World Resort is the world's number one vacation destination" (You, 1991).

That large advertising spread is a prime example of the changing face of mass leisure in a high tech society. Today we see the influence of a massive, integrated high-tech operation to provide the complete door-to-door vacation experience in a single, complete package. Though it is a substantial change, it is not new. I can describe high tech tourism with examples for the past, present, and future.

The Past

Disneyland represents the past. I am not calling Disneyland old-fashioned or out-of-date. It is the Founding Father, you might say. I believe the future of mass leisure and vacation began with Walt Disney's visionary conception of a home for his characters, set into theme worlds where children could visit the living embodiment of their dreams. Now this may sound a bit high-flown, but, as adults, we tend to forget how real the imaginary is to children.

Walt Disney's vision was to put the fans and their families into his characters' world, instead of trying to put his characters into their fans' world. For children, this creates a special situation. The parents are towed along in their wake, serving primarily as the keepers of the purse. This is not to say that adults are not served. The present situation attends to that need.

The Present

Disney World represents the present. We already know that children are well served. However, many vacationers are not parents attending children. The newer theme areas include many features that are primarily for adults. Outdoor recreations include golf courses. Epcot Center focuses on many adult interests. The underlying idea is that Disney World

provides something of interest for **every** member of the family. The cruise ship program refers to "the most comprehensive childrens' and teens' program in the industry, led by professionally trained youth counselors." In other worlds, babysitters. Mom and Dad's ideal vacation: The kids are happy, and somewhere else.

The Future

Jurassic Park (Crichton, 1990) represents the fictitious future. The major change is in the entertainment: Live dinosaurs. However, it is not as different from the present as we might think. While this kingdom is on an island, allowing self-government (in a sense), major theme parks are already quasi-kingdoms. Jurassic Park only ups the ante on the investment cost and level of sophistication of the entertainment. In fact, in many respects its overall plan seems less comprehensive than Disney World's. What do you offer the couples and singles? Where is the hands-on excitement? After you see the live dinosaurs, what then?

In examining theme parks, Crichton has one of his characters summarize the central idea of Jurassic Park:

> ...you have to go back to the initial concept of the resort. The concept of the most advanced amusement park in the world, combining the latest electronic and biological technologies. I'm not talking about rides. Everybody has *rides*. Coney Island has *rides*. And these days everyone has animatronic environments. The haunted house, the pirate den, the wild west, the earthquake-- everyone has those things. So we set out to make biological attractions. *Living* attractions. Attractions so astonishing they would capture the imagination of the entire world...
>
> And the secret to making money in a park...is to limit your personnel costs. The food handlers, ticket takers, cleanup crews, repair teams. To make a park that runs with minimal staff. That was why we invested in all the computer technology--we automated wherever we could (p. 62).

Another character extends this picture when he explains that

> Last year more Americans visited zoos than all professional baseball and football games combined. And the Japanese love zoos-- there are fifty zoos in Japan, and more being built. And for this zoo, [we] can charge whatever [we] want...And then there is the *merchandising*. The picture books, T-shirts, video games, stuffed toys, comic books, and pets (p. 68).

Perhaps the most frightening comment is Crichton's remark that "the fact that biotechnology can be applied to the industries traditionally subject to the vagaries of fashion, such as cosmetics and leisure activities, heightens concern about the whimsical use of this powerful new technology" (p. viii). Indeed, any time we move into technology, we will have to face ethical concerns because we encounter situations that we cannot equate to previous problems (Freeman, 1991).

Walt Disney World Resort is a perfect example of synergy on vacation, because it provides a technological interface of the complete experience. Call one telephone number and arrange everything you need: Plane, car, hotel, meals, entertainment, baby-sitting, and exercise. If it is legal, one call does it all. All of this is possible only through extensive use of high tech communications.

THE LEISURE CHALLENGE

So what does this new world of high tech, synergistically structured vacation mean to us? What impact does it have? What challenges does it present? I want to point out two problems which are related to a fair degree and must be considered in meeting the leisure challenge.

1. The United States now has a workaholic society. Though this characteristic has been visible for many years, it has become far more pervasive in recent years. We see changing family structures, with both partners employed and latchkey children. This workaholic pattern is not always the preference of the workers. A declining economic structure helps to drive the change. However, I see two notable patterns:

- People have very little time to play.
- People forget *how* to play. They even forget *what* play *is*.

While economics is a factor in the rise of the workaholic society, it is not the sole factor. The computer is now in the home, so it is easier to do some work at home to make the next day easier. Unfortunately, Parkinson's Law rules: Work expands to fill the time available. If we get one thing done, other tasks magically appear to fill our newly-freed time. Instead of working 40 hours a week, we work 50 hours, then 60. Instead of working five days a week, our job intrudes into the weekend.

At the same time, instead of people taking more leisure time, they take less. Americans are taking shorter vacations and taking more of them. This means that we must offer programs of short duration, rather than assuming that people want programs lasting in units weeks or months. We need more weekend and holiday programs scheduled when people will really leave their work behind. We need one- and two-day programs offering the short-duration options that people are willing or able to take today.

This trend does not mean that leisure and pleasure have no meaning in our society. Indeed, we now see legal efforts to set dollar values on pleasure (Allen, 1989). In this case, people are trying to be financially compensated for the value of lost pleasure resulting from permanent injuries or death of their family members or themselves. For all our focus on the dollar, people really do care about those pleasures that we usually take for granted.

2. Play has become *too* structured. This second problem always appears when we plan mass leisure. Structure enables us to process large numbers of people. That is why the tourism industry developed. Indeed, that is the only reason it is possible. A Disney World depends on having tens of thousands of people attending every day of the year. Otherwise, the structure is too expensive to support.

A city or state tourism industry survives because places of interest are already present. It does not have to provide, maintain, or support those buildings, programs, sights, or support

people. A Disney World must provide everything from the ground up. Otherwise, there is no reason for tourists to come. Tourists visit San Francisco because it is San Francisco. They know that there are sights to see, things to do, places to go, things to buy. The San Francisco Tourist Board exists primarily to let the tourist know about the major options and to coordinate some major arrangements, such as lodging and perhaps show tickets.

A Disney World did not start with something people want to visit. It created the setting, developed the entertainment, then set out to convince the public that it wanted to go there. Disney World is a special case. It started with characters that adults knew from their childhood-- characters that no one else could legally use in competition. It then created the setting for those characters, developed rides and events based on those characters, and finally it build the understructure of coordinated services that made it convenient for families to visit that world.

However, our modern play seems at times too Pavlovian, too much like mice running through a maze. Indeed, that is the image of the tourism industry. It suffers from the **If This Is Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium Syndrome**: trying to cram too much experience into too little time. When a traveler finishes the trip, the experience is retold in numbers, not meaning-- so many countries, so many museums.

Play is becoming more structured and less creative or original. For example, is a computer game truly play? It is **completely rule-bound**, which by our scholarly definitions is not really play. The computer calls for little imagination, for it creates a world that they player must accept and fit into **exactly as it is**. There is no option. In a sense, it is more an experience in conformity and unquestioning acceptance of life as it is presented to us. What are the implications of this increasing dependence on highly structured leisure and recreation?

THE LEISURE SOLUTION

In broad terms, I see two things that we must do to solve the leisure services problem. **First, we must learn to <u>use</u> technology, rather than just react to it.** Too many people fear technology because it is complex and seems hard to understand. What we need to do is learn how it can help us. The media remind us that 70% of the people who own VCRs **cannot program them**. This is our current metaphor for an unmanageable (if not threatening) technology.

The media does not remind us that 30 years ago our home visual options were three television networks and perhaps an educational channel (assuming that you lived within 50 miles of a large city). Today, we think of poor television options as a cable system with less than 30 channels. I feel limited because my current system offers only 35 channels.

I can buy a satellite dish and get over 100 channels. These antennas are visible in every rural area of this nation, yet we do not assume that the occupant of that house or trailer has a Ph.D. in electrical engineering. We do not expect someone to understand how a car works, and be able to repair it, simply to be capable of using it effectively.

Computer software companies complain that most questions that they receive are unnecessary: They are answered in the manuals. Unfortunately, people don't read the manuals. They believe that the operation of technology should be intuitive. Our attitude (our human nature) says, "This thing is too hard to operate, because I can't get it to work without reading

the directions, even though this is the first one I've ever seen." As someone once said, "Nothing is foolproof, because fools are so ingenious."

Second, we need innovation and creativity in our approach to leisure options. We need to develop a less forced leisure structure. We need more simulation, wider options for individuals. I realize that this will not be easy, because we must provide for the varying tastes of a vast population.

You've all heard the joke about the man who sat down in a restaurant and gave the waiter an extremely complicated food order. He wanted eggs, scrambled and cooked in the shell, sauteed oysters and onions, leeks on the side, with turtle soup and sherbet for dessert. The waiter said, "Is that it?" The man said, "Yes," and the waiter turned around and yelled "One number three!" The world is complex, but it is not so complex as we believe.

PUTTING THE LEISURE SOLUTION INTO REAL-WORLD TERMS

Two Over-Riding Points

1. The population is too large. Certainly we face many problems. With 250 million people in the United States, they cannot all stay at that wonderful hotel. They can't all be in that database that keeps "the race results of 20,000 Alpine skiers as well as the individual physiological profiles of some 800 elite athletes" (Johnson, 1990). They can't all go to Disney World, though sometimes it may seem as if they did. Where this has a terrible impact is on outdoor and wilderness experiences. We now have to reserve camping and sometimes hiking spaces at major parks. There are California state parks that set limits on the number of cars. If you arrive at midday, you cannot go "outdoors", because the "outdoors" is "full". Today, in many areas of the country you must "reserve" a "wilderness experience" (Reed, 1990). It is like the joke about the fliers in the Battle of Britain, known as "the few" because they were so outnumbered. Because it seemed heroic, new volunteers wanted to become pilots.

"Please, sir, I want to join the few." "I'm sorry, there are far too many."

That is our biggest leisure problem: There are far too many people for us to meet all of their wants or needs. However, that problem is also a blessing, as the second problem explains.

2. Mass tastes are based on conformity. People as a group want to do what they believe most people are doing. The joke behind National Lampoon's vacationing family movie series is that it focuses on those experiences that everyone believes everyone should do, even if it kills them.

Where mass consumerism succeeds is when it meets one of two criteria: Either (1) it knows exactly what people want, and gives it to them, or (2) it makes everyone want what it is selling. That is the pattern for mass leisure also. Disney World combined the two. What parents want is a way to entertain everyone in the family with minimal frustration in the organization and application. Disney World offered a one-stop option to meet all needs, regardless of the length of your stay: Fun for all ages and interests, and it is all in one location. That takes care of the "what people want." For the second part, they relentlessly promote Disney World as the place you want to go: They never stop trying to make us want what they have to sell.

Some General Solutions for Improving Mass Leisure

So, what can we do? I have four suggestions, though they are hardly earth shattering.

1. We must provide widely-desired options. This is what Disney World continues to do as it opens new focus areas for different interests. However, this is not a simple concern, because those widely-desired options can change. People's interests changes, which is why Disney World is opening more adult-oriented areas. Changing interests make the leisure area a real challenge.

2. We must offer more short-term options. This means a single day or evening, rather than three months on a topic. If a topic is too complex for a short study or experience, then we must break the topic into short segments on components of the topic. Break it down, so people can take what they want, without the parts that they do not want. The menu at a Chinese restaurant may be incredibly complex, but you are not required to eat it all. You pick what you want and can handle, you pay, and everyone is satisfied. If there are other things that you want to try, you will return, because you had a good, manageable experience.

3. We must provide new options. We cannot predict the face of leisure 50 years from now-- projecting for even 20 years is problematic. Like the old saying that "the only constant is change," we can be sure only that it will not be as it is now. What will technologies like virtual reality (Emery, 1990) mean to leisure? Virtual reality makes "fuller use of vision, hearing and touch" to create artificial worlds that the user "can 'virtually' enter" as if they are real (Computer, 1991). As one description of an aircraft testing and design program says

> Instead of watching a video screen, a user dons a pair of goggles that actually provide a three-dimensional video display. The user then pulls on a glove that registers hand movements, eliminating the need for a computer keyboard. Electronic sensors detect where the user is standing, facing and pointing. The view inside the goggles is of a three-dimensional aircraft. By turning his head, the user can look at the plane from different angles. By gesturing with the glove, he can open a hatch and go inside the plane, reconfigure the cabin by moving windows or seats and move into the cockpit. There he can check the control panel, start the engines, take off and fly (p. 6C).

Another account (Elmer-Dewitt, 1990) describes this personal scene:

> I'm floating in the azure sky high above Seattle. Down below, amid orange skyscrapers and forest-green mountains, the city's Space Needle... juts up like a metallic blue mushroom. A ferry is steaming across Puget Sound, while a playful killer whale spouts and dives below the vessel's bow.

What does this mean for the future of mass leisure? We are no longer looking at simple games, like the Nintendo games so popular with young children (Brookes, 1990). Nor is this like the more advanced games where you can design your own golf course, then play a round on it (Kim, 1990). Indeed, it goes far past the idea of interactive television that we still consider an innovative concept (Hanson, 1990). We thought the great breakthrough came a dozen years ago with a 24-hour sports cable channel (Callahan, 1989). Perhaps the

Japanese thought it came when they developed mini-sized robot sumo wrestlers (Sanger, 1991).

Instead, I look at this entirely new approach to participation. We can begin to alter reality, perhaps to the point that some people will not be clear on the distinction between reality and fiction.

We now have light-and-sound machines that are used to reduce anxiety (Williams, 1990). We use electronic headsets to cancel noise and save our hearing (Elmer-Dewitt, 1989). Computers can now restore unfocused photographs, making up for human performance errors (Taking, 1990). That may make us happy, but we also have computer software that will, we might say, "correct" the photo for us. Do you want to remove one person from the picture? No problem. Want to add someone who was not there? Also no problem.

This has very serious potential legal implications. The makers of the software showed a picture of the Roman Coliseum as it was in 100 A.D. by "correcting" the damaged parts of the structure in comparison to the undamaged part of the structure. On a more entertaining note, we had *TV Guide's* attempt to show how glamorous Oprah Winfrey is by putting her head on Ann-Margaret's body, ignoring significant differences in body structure and even a change of race at the neckline. The result is a world in which you cannot trust even your own senses, because we can alter their reality with technology.

4. We must react quickly to changing needs and interests. This is the ear-to-the-ground aspect of leisure. We do not want to become faddists. We need experienced professional judgement. Seeing a trend (as opposed to a fad) is very difficult, but we must try to do it. Along this line, if possible we must provide in our budgets for ways that will allow us to reallocate some resources immediately when we detect such trends. "I can't do anything before next year" is a response that loses our community support.

How Do We Accomplish These Things?

We must utilize our rapidly-advancing technology to tie national and world-wide approaches together (Shear, 1990). We need more linked computer networks, not more conventions with formal presentations. We need computer bulletin boards of activities, with detailed online descriptions. We need to be able to learn *very* quickly what other people are doing. If you got the idea from *Newsweek* or the TV news, it is too late.

Most of our means of professional communication are archaic, largely remnants of the 19th century. For example, how is AAHPERD more advanced in the speed and depth of its communication of new ideas than it was in its first decade, from 1885 to 1895? Before 1890 we had a convention that compared, debated, and demonstrated **every major approach** to teaching activities that was then in use-- all in a single brief convention.

Today, we largely gather to debate how many sport scientists can dance on the head of a pin. We need conferences and conventions that **address real-world, people-oriented problems and suggest feasible solutions**. People are looking for integrated packages of leisure experiences, and they want it done right now. We must remember that most people's belief is that this afternoon is too late; I want it done and confirmed this second.

We tend to forget that popular entertainment and recreation is increasingly oriented toward high tech: This means high tech sights, high tech sounds, high tech organization (or,

how to handle the most people or the greatest need with the most limited resources in space, time, people, and expense).

And before we give in to our technophobia, our common fear of high tech (Dvorak, 1990; Toffler, 1991), we might take note of a headline from the New York Times News Service (1990): "Adaptability called key to happiness over 65." In short, people must be able to adapt to change, rather than fight it or resent it. Whether we like the idea of high tech affecting and changing leisure patterns and practices is of no importance. It will do so regardless of our feelings, so we must make our peace with it. However, if we want to be truly effective, we much learn to use it to the benefit of our programs and ourselves.

I have not offered concrete solutions, because any concrete solution that I offer may quickly fall out of date. I offer instead a few broad guidelines:

1. Act, instead of react
2. Offer more short-term options, and offer them only briefly
3. Use technology as an asset
4. Remember: Leisure is a volatile market, not a constant

We can meet our challenge successfully, because as much as technology changes, the leisure challenge itself does not change. People want leisure options, as they have for centuries. However, the options that they want are based largely on the media, the publicity and promotional focus, the technology of their own time and place.

We must seek that do-able juncture between what they want and what we can design and provide to meet their wants. The for-profit industries succeed in that task every day. There is no reason why we cannot also succeed in that same task within the constraints of our own assigned function and place in that market. If we embrace technology as an asset, we will find that our challenge is far easier to meet.

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